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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 171406Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1095
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHMFIUU/CJTJF HOA
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 000212

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/FO, AF/E AND AF/RSA MBITTRICK
DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF/E RMEDRANO
DEPT FOR DS/DSS/ITA DROTHSTEIN
DAR ES SALAAM FOR DAO
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: "RAIDS" ESCALATE TO ARMED CONFLICT ON ANJOUAN

REF: ANTAN 200

¶1. (SBU) Contacts in the Comoros report a Union Army (AND) "raid" on Anjouan beginning March 15 has turned into a series of battles. Having reportedly freed eight prisoners and taken two minor casualties, part of the AND landing force returned to its staging point in Moheli. However, a small AND contingent appears to have remained on Anjouan. This group narrowly avoided an ambush March 16, helped by a pro-Union Anjouanese civilian informant. According to our source, with this warning the AND forces attacked the ambushing elements of Bacar's militia, killing five. No casualties were reported on the AND side in this battle; as of this writing, it appears some number of AND forces remain in Anjouan.

¶2. (SBU) The same Embassy contact reported that Union President Sambu signed March 17 an official decree authorizing the AND to launch the military option.

¶3. (SBU) Embassy Defense Attache arrived in Moheli, in the Comoros, to meet with AND Commander Colonel Salimou. The DATT confirmed the details of the March 15 raid, but did not yet have information to confirm the report of the averted ambush. DATT noted the March 15 raid on Anjouan was at least the third such operation, following commando missions on March 10 and 12. Based on DATT reporting and other Embassy contacts, the AND has captured up to a total of 30 of Bacar's militia, and has sustained two wounded.

Mbeki and Kiwete

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¶4. (U) With appreciation for reporting from Pretoria and Dar, among other posts, on the Anjouan issue, we note an interesting back and forth in the media between Presidents Mbeki and Kiwete. A March 17 Cape Times article, amidst confused analysis, reported, "President Thabo Mbeki has now apparently averted an imminent invasion of Anjouan by federal Comoros government troops backed by an AU force, and has persuaded AU (and Tanzania) President Jakaya Kikwete to consider Bacar's offer to hold elections."

¶5. (SBU) A March 14 article on Independent Online (www.iol.co.za), offered an opposite take on events from the Cape Times piece, more closely reflecting reality as we see it. In it, Tanzanian Foreign Minister Membe is quoted as saying, "There were many opportunities for a negotiated settlement, but Bacar squandered all those chances. He is a liar." Confident of swift victory with limited casualties, FM Membe further said in OIL, "the (military) process is now irreversible." We defer to Pretoria and Dar to interpret what

Presidents Mbeki and Kikwete actually are thinking.

¶6. (SBU) Foreign Minister Jaffar called Ambassador on March 13, in the wake of the first reports of Mbeki's statements from Mauritius supporting Bacar's "promise" of island elections in May, to say that the Union would continue on its present course toward invasion and to reiterate his request for US help; he clearly saw Bacar's gambit as a ruse and Mbeki's reply as naïve and unhelpful.

¶7. (SBU) Two Malagasy newspapers, Midi and L'Express, ran articles on the Comoros situation March 17. Midi quoted Union Spokesman and Education Minister Said Bakar, "It is no longer possible to reopen negotiations with this man (Bacar). We have launched an operation to restore order in Anjouan by military force. This operation will follow its course to the end." L'Express quoted an unnamed Union official who confirmed, "the AND launched an operation on Anjouan to free political prisoners, leading to an exchange of fire in which two Union soldiers were wounded."

MARQUARDT